

# Traffic Safety Facts

## Laws

DOT HS 810 881W

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## Sobriety Checkpoints

### Background

NHTSA encourages States to enact legislation authorizing the use of sobriety checkpoints and to actively use checkpoints once they are authorized. Sobriety checkpoints are an effective tool that can be used as part of a high-visibility enforcement strategy, combined with publicity to reduce impaired driving by creating both general and specific deterrence.

NHTSA defines a sobriety checkpoint as the stopping of vehicles, or a specific sequence of vehicles (i.e., every fifth vehicle), at a predetermined fixed location to detect drivers who are impaired by alcohol or other drugs. One purpose of a sobriety checkpoint is to increase the perceived risk of detection and arrest for individuals who might otherwise decide to drive impaired. This is a checkpoint's general deterrence effect. The fact that all, or a proportion of, vehicles are stopped reduces the impaired drivers' confidence that they can

avoid detection by concealing or compensating for alcohol or drug impairment.

### Key Facts:

- In 2006, there were 17,602 alcohol-related fatalities in motor vehicle crashes.
  - Of these 17,602 fatalities, 15,121 died in crashes in which at least one driver or nonoccupant had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 grams per deciliter or higher.
  - In 2006, 41 percent of fatal motor vehicle crashes nationwide were alcohol-related.
  - Inpatient rehabilitation costs for motor vehicle injuries average \$11,265 per patient.
  - Checkpoints enhance the visibility of overall impaired-driving enforcement efforts and contribute significantly to general and specific deterrence.
  - Literature reviews show that checkpoints are associated with reductions in alcohol-related fatalities—a median decrease of 20 percent.
  - Checkpoints were found effective regardless of staffing levels or location movement. This means low staffing and frequently moving checkpoints are feasible enforcement options.
- Some States engage in very active high-visibility enforcement efforts that feature the use of sobriety checkpoints, such as the States in Region 3, which participate in "Checkpoint Strikeforce."
  - To date, sobriety checkpoints are authorized in 38 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Rhode Island, Texas, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Wyoming do not allow checkpoints.

### Incentive Grant Program

The alcohol-impaired-driving countermeasures incentive grant program (under Section 410 of chapter 4 of Title 23) encourages States to adopt and implement effective programs to reduce traffic safety problems resulting from individuals driving while impaired by alcohol. One of the criterion under which a State may qualify for a Section 410 grant includes a high-visibility law enforcement campaign and the use of sobriety checkpoints or saturation patrols. A State may use these grant funds for alcohol-impaired prevention programs including checkpoints or saturation patrols. In addition, the 10 States with the highest alcohol-related fatality rates are eligible to receive additional funds under the

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Section 410 program. At least half of these funds must be spent on high-visibility enforcement efforts. The implementing regulations for the Section 410 program are located in 23 CFR Part 1313.

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